

# Marion Soil & Water Conservation District Annual Report 2007-08



## The Importance of Precision Ag

Precision agriculture is the means that a farmer can use to implement a agricultural management system for his fields and crops. This system helps the farmer look at all the variables commonly found in farming such as: different soil types, changes in landscape, and adjustments in crop yields within a single field. The basics of precision agriculture technology include the Global Positioning System (GPS), Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and variable rate equipment and controllers.

The potential impact to producers is reduced pesticide and nutrient use and thereby reduced input costs and help reduce leaching and runoff of nutrient and pesticides into water system in the area. Growers can apply pesticides, nutrients, and water only to locations and in the amounts needed in the field based on the exact need. Producers also benefit by the increasing availability of better and timely information about their crops for decision-making. Some common systems include auto guidance for farm equipment, Lightbars to mark fertilizer placements, Variable-rate nutrient and pesticides placement, and Variable-rate irrigation.

One study from southeast Missouri by Buchholz and Wollenhaupt, showed that varying fertilizer applications in an 80-acre field based on grid sampling technique, increased gross returns by \$7000. An investment of \$1000 in soil sampling and additional fertilizer increased yields from 90-100 bu/A to 136 bu/A. Cost for soil sampling, mapping, and variable rate application over and above uniform farming methods was about \$12.50 per acre. It should be realized however that every one should not expect similar returns. It depends mainly on what type of fertility levels a particular soil has to begin with. How often this additional investment needs to be made remains to be seen. It is necessary to develop reliable soil sampling strategies that are based on an optimum number for soil samples. **Contributed by: Rebecca Harper, Marion District Conservationist, NRCS**

### Commissioners:

James F. Huggins, Chairman  
John A. Wiggins, Vice-Chairman  
J. Aubrey White, Sec. /Treasurer  
Fletcher M. Johnson.-Commissioner  
Ernest O. Hinson, Jr. – Commissioner  
C.P. Mincey, Commissioner Emeritus  
C. E. Roark, Associate Commissioner  
David B. Owens, Associate  
Commissioner  
Lisa Foxworth, District Clerk

### Assisted By:

NRCS, Rebecca Harper, District  
Conservationist, Bradley Poston, Soil  
Conservation Technician, and  
Nathaniel Hughes, NRCS

SCDNR, Sam Ward, Program  
Coordinator

### A note from the Commissioners:

We, the Marion Conservation District Commissioners, would like to express our appreciation to all agricultural and related agencies, plus participating land users for making this another successful year for improving and conserving our natural resources. Also, a special thanks to Marion County, our school administration, teachers, and affiliate members for promoting conservation.

**The Marion Soil & Water Conservation District prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.**

# Annual Awards Banquet

## 2008 Conservation Friend Award



Alex graduated from Clemson University with a degree in Agronomy. He started with Natural Resources Conservation Service 34 years ago, working in St. Matthews, Kingstree, Georgetown, Dillon, Horry, and Marion counties.

Alex began working as the District Conservationist in Marion with double duties in Horry from 1994 to 2003. In 2006 he returned to Marion as a Resource Conservationist for the Pee Dee Area.

During his stay in Marion he coordinated over 1500 acres of wetland restoration, implemented the Nichols Watershed Project, began no-till farming with the use of a Water Quality grant from DHEC, and has continued with history of all former and future DC's in trying to help with the Smith Swamp Watershed Project. Alex also worked in Afghanistan for 2 tours during his last couple of years before he was then named, Resource Conservationist before retiring in August, 2007.

Alex will be missed by all and will always be a conservation friend.

## 2007 Conservation Farmer Award



Don Atkinson received the Conservation Farmer Award for 2007 from the Marion Soil & Water Conservation District. Don is married to Sherri Cook Atkinson and has 3 children. On his farm in Mullins he farms prescribed grazing, 300 acres of pasture of which is 150 acres of hay land with 150 acres of Hay land custom bailed. He has a Brangus herd of about 250 cows, 86 heifers, and 10 bulls. Don Partners with other landowners on about 200 acres of pasture that he helps manage for a certified Brangus herd of cattle of 100 acres. He has installed four heavy use areas, a grass waterway, a water controlled structure for a livestock pond, and over 100 acres of grass planting over the last four years. He has introduced portable feeding stalls to help manage his manure distribution better. He manages his hay production to increase protein content, not quantity. He understands that his pH is as important as his fertilizer, so he did grid sampling of his pastures to improve his production. Don incorporates as many conservation practices in his everyday life as possible.

# Conservation Essay Competition

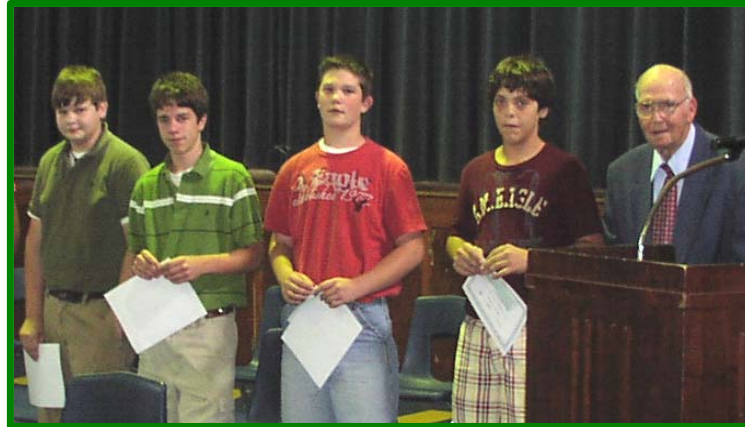
Each year the Marion Soil & Water Conservation District offers an Essay Contest to local school students in 5th-8th grades. Conservation at Home and Community and Families Working Together, were this years topics. Grades 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup>, write 300-500 word essays, and grades 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> write 500-700 word essays. All 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners from each school receive an award and certificate of appreciation from the District Office.

## Johnakin Middle School-8th grade



Shown above, left to right: John A. Wiggins, Vice-Chairman, Marion SWCD, Kendrick Reed- 1st place winner, Elizabeth Pridgen-2nd place winner, and Jasmine Bennett-3rd place winner.

## Pee Dee Academy-8th grade



Left to Right: Brandon Foxworth -3rd place winner, O'Brian Larrimore-1st place winner, Will Daniels-2nd place winner and Trey Sawyer-3rd place winner, SWCD Commissioner, Fletcher M. Johnson,Sr.

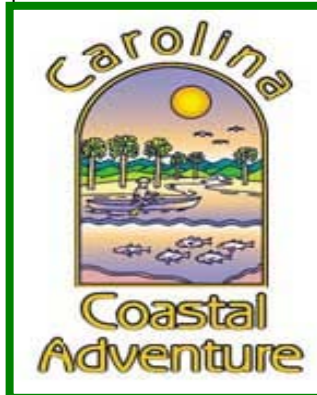
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# Carolina Coastal Adventure

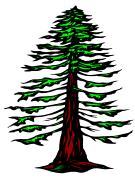
Carolina Coastal Adventure provides an opportunity each year for 9th and 10<sup>th</sup> grade high school students to spend a fun weekend on the coast while learning about South Carolina's natural resources.

Canoeing through swamps, venturing into salt marches, learning medicinal uses of native plants, protecting water quality, exploring the Charleston Harbor from a research vessel and trawling for the creatures who live there, listening to Gullah story telling by a bonfire on the beach and many more exciting learning activities and adventures.

**Get down and dirty with the outdoors!**







# Arbor Day



Our Arbor Day Celebration consists of making personal contacts with our youth in our public and private school sectors. Each year the conservation District distributes 500 – 800 trees to K-5 and some K-4 students throughout the county. Each student receives a tree, with the hope that these seedlings will be planted for future generations.

- Pictured left are a few students and their teacher from Rains Centenary Elementary School after receiving their Arbor Day Trees.

## Soil Stewardship

Program inserts are passed out to local churches that request materials for the observance of our Soil Stewardship week. Also, activity placemats are distributed to local restaurants for outreach of conservation in efforts to reach as many men, women, & children as possible, to understand the importance of conserving Soil and Water.

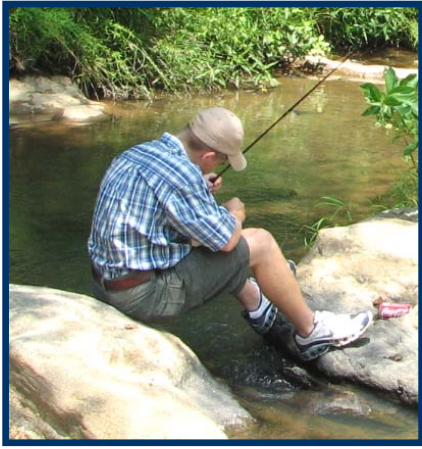


## Conservation Booklets



These booklets are given to 1st – 5th grades to expand our children's knowledge of conservation and to share the importance of conserving our Natural Resources.

# Governor's Institute @Lander University



Marion Soil & Water Conservation District sponsored **Cody Gibson (fishing left)** and **Mathew Moore (canoeing right)**, shown above. Each year, rising juniors and seniors at the SC Institute for Natural Resource Conservation compete for college scholarships. Based on a comprehensive written exam given on the closing day, participants test their knowledge on topics such as soils, water quality, watersheds, wildlife and conservation planning. Students must be sponsored through their local Soil and Water Conservation District. Conservation Districts support the program by paying the fees for their attendance.

## Fair Display



Our District always sets up a display to reach over 10,000 people in Marion County. Conservation practices are shared through displayed photos and conservation pamphlets. All plants courtesy of Garden-Earth, Hwy. 501, Marion.

## Rental Equipment

The District has two **no-till drills** available for rent to the public for the amount of \$9.00 per acre. Over the past 9 years over 6,500 acres of no-till have been planted with the district's drills. **NOTE:** a \$100 deposit is required for rental use of all equipment. A **pasture aerator** is available for rent at a cost of \$15 per half day and \$30 per whole day. A **brillion seeder** is also available for rent. Also, a **drip irrigation machine** is available for local vegetable producers. Anyone interested in renting the no-till grain drills, aerator or seeder should contact the office at 423-1742, ext. 101.



**Soil CD's and printed maps  
are available for a small fee.**

# Conservation Accomplishments

Conservation Programs:	Funds Applied for:	Funds Obligated to participants:	Funds received by participants:
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$850,000	\$261,730.00	\$342,170.89
Farmland and Ranch Protection Program	\$1,416,280.00	\$0.00	\$0
Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program	\$1,120.00	\$1,120.00	\$5,603.07
Conservation Security Program	\$163,265.00	\$163,265.00	\$163,265.00
Wetland Reserve Program	\$2,400,000.00	\$0	\$0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$4,830,665.00</b>	<b>\$426,115.00</b>	<b>\$511,038.96</b>

## Join us as an Affiliate Member:

The SWCD provides conservation booklets to local schools 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades. Also, we offer to send (2) delegates to the Governor's Institute for Natural Resource Conservation at Lander University and (2) delegates to Carolina Coastal Adventure in Berkeley County each year. We also provide 600-800 trees to Kindergarten students throughout the county each year for Arbor Day.

If you would like to help us conserve our Natural Resources by becoming an affiliate member, please call us at: 423-1742, ext. 101. Thank you in advance for your participation.

### Amount you wish to contribute:

\$25.00	Bronze Member
\$50.00	Silver Member
\$100.00	Gold Member
\$500.00	Life Member



# A Small Family Farm



**Standing: Melissa (Elliott Porter's Daughter), Grandchildren (L to R): Caty, Mark, George, Dominick, Faith, Fay (Elliott's wife), Karis and Elliott Porter.**

"I said I was never coming back to work on a farm and now I am back." That is what Elliott Porter said eight years ago when he returned to Marion County and purchased a farm with his wife Faye. After leaving the farm for 38 years, the Porter's bought a small farm so that his family would have a place to enjoy the outdoors. His farm consists of 65 goats, four horses, six dogs, two donkeys, and two ponies. Although this may sound like a hobby to some big farmers, it is their love of the land that keeps the Porter's going. "We bought this farm so our family could learn to love the land and have a place to enjoy it. It is an investment for the future of our family," Mr. Porter said. Conservation helps everyone understand that our natural resources are valuable. In the Porter's case it allows them to share that love with other generations. "We wanted a place our grandchild can enjoy. This weekend we had a birthday party for our grandson. All the kids have keys to the gates and all of them use the farm during the weekend to enjoy each other and nature. Sometimes we may see too much of each other." Mr. Porter joked. With the help of the Small Farmer Program, the Porter's were able to install a grazing and watering system that allows them to move animals around and better use their grasses. His advice to others is that goats need an electrical fence installed. They lost numerous goats due to wild dogs several years ago. Fortunately, their herd has replenished. It did, however, teach them that farming has its troubles. "Farming is a lot of work, but it has brought my family closer," he said. Elliott Porter

# Pond Clinic

The Marion Soil & Water Conservation District held a pond clinic January 24, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. at the Marion Beeson Building. Jack Wetstone with Clemson Extension, Elizabeth Osier, Fisheries Biologist with SCDNR, and Sam Ward with SCDNR were the guest speakers for this event. The main topics of discussion were: Weed control, stocking rates, fertilization, and tax exemptions. Sam Ward also cooked a wonderful meal that was enjoyed by all



## 35 Years to Conservation

Chairman, James F. Huggins received his 35 year pin of service at the SCACD, Conservation Partnership Conference in Myrtle Beach, in January, 2008. Chairman Huggins was first a member of the Conservation District Board as an Associate Commissioner. In 1972, he joined the official board with continuous dedication to conserve Marion Counties land. Chairman Huggins never tires of being a great leader in conserving conservation and has always been an asset to the Marion County District Board.

**Thank you Chairman Huggins for such continuous dedication to conservation!**

# Swintz Family Restores Wetlands

Susan Riales has fond memories of growing up on the farm in the Gresham Community of Marion County where she still lives with her family, including her 85 year old Mother, Ruth Swintz. “Mother’s been here since she was twenty years old,” remarks Riales. “My ancestors first moved here in 1883, and this land has provided a life for many generations of our family.” The wetland area on the Swintz property consists of over 311 acres. The family entered 280 acres of that area in a thirty year Wetlands Reserve Program easement. “I think my family can do a lot of good in thirty years to help protect and improve these wetlands,” said Riales. “This wasn’t just my decision – I discussed it with the whole family.” The deed reflects the fact that the WRP easement was a family decision, and includes the signatures of Susan and three family members.



**Left to right: Susan Riales, her Mother, Ruth Swintz, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Bradley Poston, and Marion County NRCS District Conservationist, Rebecca Harper, review the details of the 30 year WRP easement.**

Riales was previously misinformed when someone told her that the wetlands on their land were virtually worthless. “I did some research before I decided to pursue this opportunity, because honestly, I didn’t really know how valuable wetland areas were in terms of environmental benefits, she confesses.” “Over the past decade or so, the general public has become more educated on the value of wetlands and their importance to ecosystems,” said, NRCS District Conservationist, Rebecca Harper. “As a natural filter, wetlands play a key role in keeping our water clean.”



When the Swintz family farmed this land, they produced: cotton, corn soybeans, and tobacco. A survey of the property indicated land area consisting of woodlands and wetlands, with Rutledge soils, poor drainage, and a high water table. That’s the probable cause for drainage work done in the 60’s to enhance

farming methods – a practice that was widely accepted and common during that time. Attitudes about wetlands and their functions took a major turn in the 80’s and from about 1987 to the present, Federal efforts to restore wetlands increased.



**Plugged channels to restore the natural hydrology.**

“Programs like WRP are returning wetlands back to their original functions, which in turn improves water quality and wildlife habitat,” explained Harper. This family is dedicated to conservation, illustrated through their actions to protect wetlands, and through their practice as backyard conservationist. Susan’s yard is full of lush wildlife habitat, and birds and other creatures have a lovely retreat to call home. She also plans to host her nephew’s Boy Scout Troop for an environmental education day. “We are stewards of the land, and while I call this home, I understand I don’t really own this place. We are just taking care of it for the next generation, and I believe that conservation is our responsibility.” The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program. It provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture. WRP was reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill). The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the program. Funding for WRP comes from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

-  **30-Year Easement** - Easement payments through this option are 75 percent of what would be paid for a permanent easement.
-  **Permanent Easement** - USDA pays up to 100 percent of the cost of restoring the wetland.



# Programs Available for cost-share

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## Environmental Quality Incentives Program

EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practices and a maximum term of ten years. These contracts provide incentive payments and cost-shares to implement conservation practices. Persons who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production on eligible land may participate in the EQIP program. EQIP may cost-share up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices. Incentive payments may be provided for up to three years to encourage producers to carry out management practices they may not otherwise use without the incentive. However, limited resource producers and beginning farmers and ranchers may be eligible for cost-shares up to 90 percent. Farmers and ranchers may elect to use a certified third-party provider for technical assistance. EQIP - 73 applications were taken for the fiscal year of 2007, 15 applicants were funded, 301 acres of pasture planted, 5130 acres of precision agriculture, 15.6 miles of fencing and 46 watering facilities practices were installed.

### B.W Reason's pasture planting.



## Conservation Securities Program

CSP promotes conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture, and range land, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation. The program is available in all 50 States, the Caribbean Area and the Pacific Basin area. The program provides equitable access to benefits to all producers, regardless of size of operation, crops produced, or geographic location. In 2007 17 contracts with 7,263 acres of conservation practices are on going.

## Small, Limited Resource, and Beginning Farmers Ranchers

The purpose of this program is to ensure that NRCS programs are administered in a way that enables small, limited resource and beginning farmers and ranchers maintain and develop economic viability in farm operations; to ensure NRCS technical assistance programs and activities reach small, limited resource and beginning farmers and ranchers; and that technical practices and information are relevant to the needs of these farmers and ranchers.

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## Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program reduces soil erosion, protects the Nation's ability to produce food and fiber, reduces sedimentation in streams and lakes, improves water quality, establishes wildlife habitat, and enhances forest and wetland resources. It encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips, or riparian buffers. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract. Cost sharing is provided to establish the vegetative cover practices. In 2007 12 acres of buffers, 1 acre of grass waterway, and 409 acres were impacted by buffers.

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## Conservation Securities Program

WHIP is for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. Through WHIP USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. WHIP agreements between NRCS and the participant generally last from 5 to 10 years from the date the agreement is signed. In 2007 333 acres of prescribed burning, and 1.1 mile of firebreaks were installed.

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If you are interested in applying for one or more of these programs, please give us a call or stop by the office.  
(843) 423-1742, ext. 101 or 102

# Affiliate Members

**Ella Moore  
Connie Gibson  
Jordan Scrap Metal  
Nichols Farm Supply  
Swamp Fox Timber  
City Auto Parts  
Gore's Tire Service  
William L. Rogers, Jr.  
Alex Johnson, Jr.**

**C.E. Roark  
James G. Wiggins  
Smith-Rogers Oil. Co.  
Farm Bureau  
Thomas Supply  
Bridger's Drug Store  
Battle L. P. Gas  
First Citizens  
Joe McIntyre**

**James F. Huggins  
Fred's Restaurant  
Howard B. Smith Agency  
James Carson Benton, Jr.  
Marion Animal Hospital  
Anderson Brothers Bank  
Blanton Supplies  
Harper's Electric  
Garden/Earth**